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A SPECIAL REPORT

**TEENAGE SOVIET JEWISH IMMIGRANTS:
STRONGLY JEWISH, MODERATELY RELIGIOUS**

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Comparing Jewish Teens in Israel, Visitors from the USSR, and Native Israelis / Family Structure and Geographic Origin / Exploring Jewish Identity: Jewish Observance, Acceptance of Mixed Marriage, Ideal Identity, Jewish Symbols, Perception of the Holocaust / Identity Comes From the Family / Zionism and Aliya / Absorption in Israel / Attitudes toward Authority and Social Norms / Democracy and Politics / The Important Things in Life

Some 400,000 Jews have immigrated to Israel since September 1989, including 350,000 from the Soviet Union. Who are these people and what do they think? After being cut off from Jewish life for two generations, what can remain of their Jewish identity?

Comparing Jewish Teens in Israel, Visitors from the USSR, and Native Israelis

This is a study of three groups of teenagers, two from the ex-Soviet Union plus a "control group" of Israeli-born. In all likelihood, the parents and even grandparents of these ex-Soviets may never have attended a Passover Seder or witnessed many other events that Jews living in the West take for granted. Hence their values were likely to have been most affected by the impact of 70 years of anti-religious Communism and Soviet state antisemi-

tism. Fortunately, we were able to compare a group of Soviet immigrant teenagers (olim) to a group of teenage Soviet Jews visiting Israel as tourists, as well as to a comparable group of Israeli teenagers, to compare their attitudes and see where and why they may differ.

The sample of immigrants from the Soviet Union included 162 young Jews aged 14 to 17, who had immigrated to Israel during 1989 and 1990, and who were interviewed at a two-week summer camp in 1990 run by Yuli Edelstein and Camp Ramah Israel, with the support of the CRB Foundation. Interviews were carried out simultaneously with 94 young Soviet Jews of the same age attending the summer camps of the World Zionist Organization's Youth and Hechalutz Department during a one-month visit to Israel as tourists. This group was far more obviously Zionist and Jewish

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than the young olim and appears to embody the highest degree of Jewish identity and militancy possible today in the former Soviet Union. Both the olim and the tourists were interviewed at the beginning of their summer camp experience and before they could be influenced by it.

For purposes of comparison, interviews were conducted at three academic high schools in the Jerusalem area. The resulting sample included of 255 young Israelis selected by religion and gender to match the general Israeli student population.

Family Structure and Geographic Origin

One immediate factor which differentiates the life experience of Soviet-born teenagers from their Israeli counterparts is family size. Nearly all Soviet Jewish families have only one or two children, while among the young Israelis there were practically no only children. Over 60 percent of the Israeli high school students come from families with two or three children.

Over 65 percent of the young olim came from the 10 large cities listed in Table 1. There was little geographical mobility between place of birth and indicated residence.

Table 1

PLACE OF BIRTH OF PARENTS AND YOUNG SOVIET OLIM (percent)

	Father	Mother	Young
Moscow, Russia	17	13	18
Leningrad, Russia	8	10	11
Kiev, Ukraine	9	6	9
Odessa, Ukraine	4	3	5
Kharkov, Ukraine	3	4	3
Tashkent, Uzbekistan	3	8	6
Baku, Azerbaijan	6	6	5
Minsk, Byelorussia	3	1	5
Kishinev, Moldova	5	1	3
Other	42	48	35
Total	100	100	100

Exploring Jewish Identity: Jewish Observance, Acceptance of Mixed Marriage, Ideal Identity, Jewish Symbols, Perception of the Holocaust

In a study of this nature, being Jewish cannot be reduced to its legal or *halakhic* definition. Belonging to the Jewish people and claiming to be Jewish are highly complex phenomena which must of necessity

take into account the affective and psychological aspects that make up each individual's personality. This is basically why the researchers took interviewees' self-definitions as the criterion of Jewish identity.

Practically all of those interviewed from all three population groups defined themselves as Jewish, a self-definition primarily based on birth. The Israelis also defined being Jewish as a matter of culture (52 percent), education (57 percent), and/or religion (46 percent). For the Soviet Jews, being Jewish is more an expression of loyalty/allegiance (olim — 47 percent, tourists — 60 percent), a response to antisemitism (66 percent and 65 percent respectively), and/or an identification with the State of Israel (60 percent and 71 percent). Generally speaking, the young Soviet Jews define themselves as belonging to the Jewish people (olim 88 percent and tourists 86 percent). There is no doubt that this affiliation is experienced intensely, since at least 95 percent of the Soviet Jews think it important that the Jewish people should exist forever.

Table 2

FACTORS OF JEWISH IDENTIFICATION

Would you say that you are Jewish by:

	Olim		Tourists		Israelis	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Birth	1	82	1	90	1	88
Reaction to antisemitism	2	66	3	65	7	34
Relation to Israel	3	60	2	71	2	60
Education	4	48	6	43	3	57
Loyalty	5	47	4	60	6	37
Commitment	6	41	7	42	8	27
Culture	7	32	8	34	4	52
Hope	8	30	5	44	9	18
Religion	9	10	9	21	5	46
I do not regard myself as Jewish	10	1	10	3	10	0

In evaluating Jewish observance, the survey tells us not the actual behavior of those interviewed, but rather how they perceive their practices. Nevertheless, 66 percent of the Soviet olim said they observe some of the traditions, with an additional 15 percent who said they observe most of the traditions. In all, some 82 percent of the olim and 84 percent of the tourists said they observe at least some Jewish traditions, compared to only 75 percent for the Israelis.

Table 3

OBSERVANCE OF JEWISH TRADITIONS
(percent)

Do you observe Jewish traditions?

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
In all its details	1	2	5
Most of the traditions	15	21	31
Some of the traditions	66	60	38
None of the traditions	18	16	25

Looking more closely at religious practices and standards, we find young Soviet Jews somewhat more distant than Israelis from Judaism's normative rules. For example, 61 percent of the Israelis said they observed *kashrut* at home, while only 4 percent of the olim and 17 percent of the tourists do so.

A considerable majority of the young Soviet Jews and Israelis have accepted Jewish standards. However, somewhat more young Soviet Jews are prepared to accept marriage with a non-Jew (olim 21 percent, tourists 18 percent) than are the Israelis (15 percent). The Soviet Jews seem to have a more flexible attitude than the Israelis toward not only Jewish norms but also social norms. More of the former reject the need to convert, and think that *aliya* is enough in the case of marriage with a non-Jew.

Table 4

REACTIONS TO MIXED MARRIAGES
(percent)

If a close member of your family expressed the intention of marrying a non-Jew, what would be your reaction?

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
There is nothing wrong with this	37	28	30
I am ambivalent to this situation	15	15	37
I am slightly opposed	38	41	17
I am vehemently opposed	11	15	16

How do young Soviet Jews and Israelis define their Jewish identity? Is there a difference between Jewish identity as it is constructed in the diaspora, and Jewish identity as it is lived in Israel? Before replying to these

questions, it would be helpful to evaluate the specific value of Jewish identity as experienced by the various groups. For this purpose, the interviewees were asked to indicate how they would choose to be reborn if they had the opportunity. Forty-five percent of the olim would choose to be reborn as Israeli Jews, while 19 percent would choose to be American non-Jews. In contrast, over three-quarters of the Israelis (77 percent) wished to be reborn as Israeli Jews.

The tourists' replies were fairly similar to those of the Israelis, indicating that this group who came to take part in a summer program in Israel identify totally with the Israeli Jewish reality. However, we may also assume that the young tourists were selected because they were more Zionist than the average among the Jewish population in the USSR.

Table 5

IDEAL IDENTITY
(percent)

If there was an opportunity to be born again, how would you choose to be reborn?

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
Israeli Jew	45	68	77
American non-Jewish	19	3	4
American Jew	12	10	6
Russian Jew	10	3	1
Russian non-Jewish	1	1	0
Other	4	10	8
Identity and place are not important	10	4	4

The young Soviet Jews (olim and tourists) were asked to choose the symbols which they consider to best define Jewish identity. This image of Jewish identity as perceived by the Soviet Jews, while interesting on its own, is even more telling when compared with the Israelis' perception of their identity.

Both the Israelis and the olim classify the State of Israel, Jerusalem, and Hebrew as the three primary symbols of Jewish identity. Is this a consensus on identity that focuses principally on the phenomenon of rebirth in contemporary Judaism? It should be noted that the symbol of the memory of Jewish destruction (Auschwitz), which is in fifth place for the young Israelis, tends to come further down the list for the young olim.

Table 6
**JEWISH SYMBOLS AS AN EXPRESSION
 OF JUDAISM**
 (Rank; hypothetical mean = 2.50)

	Olim		Tourists		Israelis	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
The State of Israel	1	3.84	1	3.90	1	3.67
Jerusalem	2	3.82	2	3.80	2	3.37
Hebrew language	3	3.53	3	3.55	3	3.37
The study of the Torah	4	3.29	5	3.29	9	2.56
The Patriarchs	5	3.13	4	3.41	7	2.71
Your parents	6	3.09	6	3.21	4	3.30
Shabbath candles	7	3.07	11	2.82	8	2.64
Auschwitz	8	2.97	7	3.02	5	3.26
Kosher food	9	2.77	9	2.86	6	2.75
The Refuseniks	10	2.66	14	1.96	12	2.07
Albert Einstein	11	2.61	12	2.82	13	1.83
David versus Goliath	12	2.60	8	3.00	11	2.26
Social action	13	2.53	10	2.86	10	2.56
The Lubavitcher Rebbe	14	2.32	13	2.56	15	1.67
Leon Trotsky	15	1.84	15	1.86	14	1.68

In a previous study of French Jews, Auschwitz was the symbol of Jewish identity that came second, immediately after the State of Israel. Is a different attitude to Jewish identity indicated by the fact that Auschwitz is classified in eighth position by the young olim and in seventh place by the Soviet tourists? Perhaps what we should see in this perception of Jewish identity is

Table 7

PERCEPTION OF THE HOLOCAUST
(percent)

The Holocaust did not influence my Jewish feelings:

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
Completely agree	25	49	5
Agree	15	14	16
Disagree	17	10	16
Completely disagree	43	27	63

I think there is no likelihood of a Holocaust in the future:

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
Completely agree	8	8	6
Agree	13	18	30
Disagree	40	45	37
Completely disagree	38	30	27

the consequence of Soviet teaching and history, in which the destruction of the Jews in World War II has always been minimized.

Nevertheless, the Holocaust is engraved on the collective memory of the olim. Some 60 percent think that it had a major impact on their Jewish feelings, and 78 percent even fear that a new disaster might occur in the future. Interestingly, while an even greater percentage of Israelis acknowledged the impact of the Holocaust on their Jewish feelings (79 percent), fewer (64 percent) feared a new Holocaust, indicating perhaps a greater sense of security among Israeli Jews.

Identity Comes From the Family

At what age and in what circumstances did the young Soviet Jews learn that they are part of the Jewish people? These questions are important because they enable us to clarify or adjust an image of Soviet Jews who are supposedly for the most part assimilated, or at the very least have lost most of their Jewish identity referents. As Edward Kuznetsov has said, "It is a wonder that the best part of Jewry still preserved itself as Jews and was able to arise when the appropriate moment came." Transmission of identity was primarily a matter of family tradition; the youngsters who learned their identity in circumstances outside the family, whether negative (antisemitism) or simply by chance, are very much in the minority.

Table 8

AT WHAT AGE LEARNED JEWISH IDENTITY?
(percent)

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
From 1 to 5 years old	54	52	100
From 6 to 10 years old	43	46	0
From 11 to 15 years old	5	4	0

Zionism and Aliya

Young Soviet Jews generally feel close to Israel (olim — 84 percent, tourists — 91 percent) and define themselves as Zionists (olim — 69 percent, tourists — 65 percent). Interestingly, however, major differences appeared between male and female attitudes, with 21 percent of olim girls reporting they felt fairly distant from Israel, and 43 percent of tourist girls defining themselves as non-Zionists. This finding is all the more intriguing, given the fact that precisely the opposite was found for the Israelis. Israeli girls define themselves as closer to Israel and Zionism than do Israeli boys.

Table 9

CLOSENESS TO ISRAEL
(percent)

	Olim		Tourists		Israelis	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Very close	21	12	23	24	58	68
Fairly close	71	64	71	63	37	30
Fairly distant	6	21	6	12	5	2
Very distant	1	3	0	2	0	0

Table 10

ZIONIST SELF-DEFINITION
(percent)

	Olim		Tourists		Israelis	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Definitely yes	15	10	28	12	38	42
Yes	55	58	44	45	43	50
No	28	29	22	41	17	7
Definitely no	2	3	6	2	1	1

When asked about their parents' reasons for coming on aliya, the young olim primarily indicated negative reasons (antisemitism and uncertainty about the future). The positive reasons given are primarily linked to the desire to improve living conditions and concern about family ties. The young olim rank Zionist considerations last.

Absorption in Israel

Generally speaking, the young olim are satisfied with their life in Israel. Sixty-five percent of the immigrants say they are satisfied at the moment, not bad compared with the 77 percent of Israelis who say they are satisfied. The olim even believe that their attitude toward Israel has improved in the past year (81 percent). This optimism must be tempered by the fact that only 43 percent say they are sure they will remain in Israel, 42 percent think they will remain but are not sure, and 16 percent think about the possibility of leaving the country.

Evaluating their school experience in Israel, some 62 percent of the boys consider their integration at school to be problematic, while only 42 percent of the girls agree. Yet despite these concerns, the young olim wish to follow in their parents' socio-cultural footsteps. Thus 81 percent hope to pursue higher education in Israel, which is practically the same percentage as the

Israelis (79 percent), and only slightly less than the tourists (93 percent).

Young Israelis are concerned about the Soviet aliya. Eighty-three percent consider it good for Israel, 88 percent believe it should be encouraged, and 76 percent would even be prepared to give up some of their advantages in order to help this aliya.

The young olim are relatively more optimistic in their assessment of the situation in Israel than the Israelis. Some 26 percent of the olim and 40 percent of the tourists considered the situation in Israel as good, compared to only 9 percent of the Israelis. A clear majority of the Israelis (62 percent) described the situation as not good, compared to only 9 percent of the olim and 1 percent of the tourists.

Is this positive evaluation due to their lack of familiarity with the realities, or more simply because being in a transitional situation, the immigrants need to cling to a hope? Or is it because, in comparison to the situation they knew in the Soviet Union, Israeli conditions are still acceptable? For whatever reason, the olim are just as convinced as the Israelis that Israel will continue to exist in the long term (81 percent).

Table 11

EVALUATION OF THE SITUATION IN ISRAEL
(percent)

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
Very good	3	2	0
Good	23	38	9
Not so good	65	58	28
Not good	7	1	35
Not good at all	2	0	27

Beyond a certain degree of optimism, which of Israeli society's aspects do they consider to be positive, and which negative? We first asked the young olim to describe Israel's three most salient positive aspects. The most numerous replies concerned social aspects of life in Israel. The young olim are very appreciative of the quality of human relations in Israel (101 replies: kindness, niceness, respect, understanding, etc.). Next came thoughts about the political and economic system (75 replies: freedom, democracy, security, opportunities, capitalism). The young Soviet Jews were also sensitive to the country's scenery and climate (65 replies). All these factors ranked far higher than thoughts specific to Jews and Judaism (44 replies), Zionist aspects (20 replies), or the country's various

institutions and services (20 replies).

The aspects which most disturb the young olim are more diverse. They first mentioned the initial obstacles confronting new immigrants: language, bureaucracy, disorganization, the lack of housing, etc. (66 replies). Next came worries about the political situation: the Arabs, the intifada, etc. (60 replies), and then aspects relating to day-to-day comfort: the climate, dirt, architecture, etc. (47 replies). The country's general political problems (42 replies) and the material conditions of the olim (31 replies) came only after all the rest. As could have been expected from the positive replies, there are few negative references to difficulties with culture and loneliness, or with relations between ethnic groups.

Human relationships may be the key to the absorption of the Soviet Jewish immigrants. When asked what they miss most in the Soviet Union, the young olim overwhelmingly mentioned their friends, their family, and other interpersonal ties (203 replies).

Attitudes toward Authority and Social Norms

What type of relationships do the young olim have with their parents and teachers? Is their attitude to authority different? Is the permissive society in which they will have to integrate an obstacle, or will the behavioral patterns acquired by the young olim help facilitate their integration?

How do the young interviewees feel about respect for parents? When asked if this principle is the most important thing that children should be taught, the Soviet Jews (olim — 83 percent, tourists — 79 percent) agreed far more strongly than the Israelis (60 percent, and only 54 percent of Israeli girls).

What principles guide the lives of the young Soviet Jews and Israelis in their relationships with others? Are there things in common or differences that could lead to conflict when living side-by-side? In surveying attitudes toward social norms, it was found that the Soviet Jews seem far more sensitive to the dangers of nonconformity and dissent than do the Israelis. For the young olim (82 percent) the world is divided between the strong and the weak, yet only 38 percent of the Israelis accepted this assumption. Interestingly, a majority of Soviet Jews believe it is possible to trust most people, while only 38 percent of the Israelis agree. Another clear difference is found in attitudes toward change; nearly 40 percent of Soviet Jews generally oppose change, while only 14 percent of the Israelis share this view.

Table 12

ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL NORMS (percent that agree)

	Olim	Tourists	Israelis
Those who do not agree to what are society's common ideas and who ask too many questions are the cause of problems.	62	59	20
There are two kinds of people in the world, the strong and the weak.	82	72	38
It is possible to trust most people.	54	53	38
It is a mistake to do things differently from the way they were done in the past.	39	39	14

A further difference is found in attitudes toward school and relationships with teachers. While the Soviet Jews say they quite like going to school (83 percent of olim and tourists) and get on well with their teachers (85 percent of olim and tourists), for a sizable minority of the Israelis (44 percent) the school system is experienced as a burden. Thirty-two percent do not like school very much, and 12 percent do not like it at all. It is therefore not surprising that 21 percent of the young Israelis say that their relationships with their teachers are marked by a lack of understanding, with an additional 4 percent claiming they are characterized by conflict.

Democracy and Politics

With regard to democratic beliefs, the attitudes of the Soviet Jews appear to be practically identical with those of the Israelis. The three populations express broad attachment to democratic principles. However, the Israelis show a more pragmatic side. The latter are split on whether the press may be censored in order to keep up public morale, while for the Soviet Jews, the press must not be censored under any circumstances (81 percent of the olim).

Regarding the conflict with the Arabs, the Soviet Jews are clearly more nationalistic than the Israelis, with 70 percent of the olim and 73 percent of the tourists believing it possible to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict only if the Jews have sovereignty over all of Eretz Israel, compared with only 39 percent of the Israelis. Over 80 percent of the Soviet Jews but

only 33 percent of the Israelis described the intifada as a series of acts of terror against the State of Israel. Seventy-seven percent of the olim agreed that acts of revenge by Israeli citizens for violent acts by the Arabs are justifiable, while 64 percent of the tourists and only 32 percent of the Israelis agreed.

The Important Things in Life

The Soviet Jews and Israelis have practically the same perception of the world of values, which is similarly composed of micro-worlds: work, consumption, leisure, social action, religion, etc. The interviewees were asked what values they consider to be important in life from a list of 26 items. Among the many intriguing questions raised by a comparison of the responses are the difference in Soviet and Israeli attitudes on the importance of getting a permanent position (No. 2 vs. No. 8), the importance of success in studies (No. 3 vs. No. 6), and the importance of earning a lot of money (No. 7 vs. No. 18).

While we have only briefly covered the highlights of the data, we must conclude above all that although Israel may not have been the first choice for many of the hundreds of thousands of new immigrants, they share with Israelis a strong Jewish identity transmitted through their families and a sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Where the values of the immigrants differ from those in the host society, hopefully both groups will be strengthened by the positive values of the other.

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Table 13

THE IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE (Rank; Theoretical mean - 2.50)

	Olim Rank Mean	Tourists Rank Mean	Israelis Rank Mean
To have good family relations	1 3.80	1 3.79	1 3.77
To get a permanent position	2 3.52	2 3.46	8 3.28
To be successful in studies	3 3.51	4 3.38	6 3.34
To get higher education, university degrees	4 3.42	3 3.39	7 3.29
To spend time with friends	5 3.38	6 3.17	3 3.47
To get a car	6 3.35	8 3.09	12 3.05
To earn a lot of money	7 3.34	7 3.15	18 2.87
To have the possibility of developing special abilities	7 3.34	5 3.23	16 2.93
To achieve a good social position	9 3.22	10 3.05	15 2.97
To look good physically	10 3.15	12 3.01	14 3.00
To be integrated in society	11 3.10	13 2.89	17 2.93
To be successful with the other sex	12 3.06	11 3.04	4 3.44
To achieve success in my job	12 3.06	13 2.89	2 3.50
To travel around the world	14 3.01	16 2.71	13 3.04
To feel that you contribute to the country	15 2.93	8 3.09	10 3.11
To have hobbies	16 2.87	17 2.67	11 3.11
To wear fashionable clothes	17 2.81	19 2.66	21 2.46
To study or acquire work experience abroad	18 2.76	17 2.67	23 2.38
To build an independent business	19 2.54	15 2.75	22 2.39
To succeed in the army	20 2.42	23 2.21	5 3.44
To be successful in sport	21 2.41	24 2.11	24 2.26
To be active in public affairs	22 2.11	21 2.24	19 2.71
To study Torah	23 2.10	20 2.29	25 2.03
To work in a particular job	24 2.03	22 2.22	9 3.19
To be a member of a social organization	25 1.81	25 1.87	20 2.48
To be religious	26 1.33	26 1.51	26 2.03